

Frequently Asked Questions about Proposed Changes in Community Center Management

1. What's GOOD about this proposal? It just seems like another cut in City services to me?

- All community centers remain open and serving the public
 - Our research into other cities facing similar budget problems showed that those that most tried to maintain the status quo, wound up closing the most centers.
- The management of community centers will be more flexible, efficient, and community focused
 - Public hours will be set to maximize community use, and this will be done in consultation with the community
 - Programs at nearby community centers will not be duplicative but will complement one another.
 - Community center performance will be more closely monitored and needed adjustments will be made quickly because geographic team management can shift resources among centers in the team.
 - General tax revenues will be freed up to support other urgent needs. This plan saves \$1.23 million relative to the 2012 Endorsed Budget.
- The old management model served us well for over 20 years, but times have changed and Parks and Recreation must change too. Parks is excited about the possibilities that this way of operating provides for the communities we serve.

2. What is the net impact of your proposal on community center public hours of operation?

- In 2010 there were a total of **1,402** public hours per week available across all community centers. 26 community centers were open at least 51 hours per week. The typical center was open 53 hours per week in the winter (37 weeks) and 46 hours per week in the summer (15 weeks) for an annual average of 51 hrs per week. Eight centers were open more than standard hours. These hours do not include those for teen Late Night or other special programs.
- In 2011 there are a total of **1,238** public hours per week available across all community centers. This represents a reduction of 12 percent or 164 hours per week based on the designation of five sites as limited use and the closure of Rainier Beach Community Center for construction. Three limited use sites were open 30 hours per week and two were open 35 hours per week.

- In 2012, there will be a total of **1,095** public hours per week available across all community centers. Using maximum estimates of public hours (70, 45, and 25 hours per week for Level 1, Level 2a, and Level 2b services respectively) results in a further reduction of 12 percent or 143 hours per week in community center public hours. This reduction includes the conversion of Southwest Community Center to a Teen Life Center and the co-location of a Department of Neighborhood's Neighborhood Service Center at that site.

3. Are community centers completely closed and vacant except for “public hours”?

- First, let's define public hours. Public hours are times when anyone can drop in and use the community centers for many purposes. Adults might pay a fee for drop-in use of the gymnasium or fitness room, teens might hang out in the teen room after school, and parents with children might register for childcare or recreation programs.
- In “non-public hours,” centers are still heavily used by participants in particular programs or by particular age groups. For instance, ARC childcare and ARC recreation classes are open to registered participants even during non-public hours. Also, rooms may be rented by a preschool or church or for meetings and celebrations. In this case the center is open to their participants or guests only. Finally, certain Parks programs such as the late night teen program, lifelong recreation, or specialized recreation programs may take place during non-public hours. During these times center use is restricted to those participating in the program.

4. Why can't the general public also use centers when they are open for use by specific programs?

- Parks staff in the building is limited during non-public hours. In general, a program or rental pays for one Parks staff person to open the doors and to see that nobody who isn't a participant enters the building. The program or rental leaders monitor only their participants in the space they are using.
- In order to monitor the rest of the building to see that there is no dangerous, inappropriate, or destructive activity taking place, it would require an additional Parks staff person. If there were sufficient funds to pay for this additional person and if there were sufficient demand for services by non-participants during these hours, Parks would create additional public hours. Parks is working on policies and procedures that would allow certain volunteers associated with renters to open and monitor the building during their programs. This, however, would reduce Parks staff present during non-

public hours and make it even more difficult to open the facility to the general public.

5. Did the City consider turning the management of the centers over to volunteers?

- Our community centers are a highly complex business with a total 2011 operating budget of \$20.2 million (including both ARC and City expenses but excluding teen life centers, lifelong recreation, and special population program expenses). The centers generate about \$8.9 million of revenue (including both ARC and City revenues) with the City's General Fund covering the remaining \$11.3 million. They provide valued recreation services to all ages, help our youth and teens grow into productive citizens, serve as the center of a community by bringing people of all ages and abilities together, and are a community-building gateway for those new to America. We believe it is unlikely that the community would be able to provide the same level of complex and specialized services exclusively through the use of volunteers.
- Although Parks is planning to expand its use of volunteers in community centers, it takes City staff to recruit, train, and supervise these volunteers on a continuing basis. Also, certain activities require highly trained, and sometimes licensed, professionals for activities dealing with children and vulnerable adults. As such, volunteers can only be used for certain activities. This limits the possibility of centers being run entirely by volunteers if the community desires the same level and range of services.
- The City owns the community centers and is responsible for the safety, routine maintenance, and ongoing preservation of these public assets. Any individual or organization that staffs a center would need to foster a similar safe environment for staff and patrons to avoid the mistreatment of the city-owned facility. This may include situations ranging from a disruptive patron, to someone overdosing in the lobby, to a teenager taking refuge from street violence. These are all issues that may place significant financial and perhaps legal burdens on individuals or groups involved in the management of centers.

- Recreation employees are highly trained professionals who deal with a wide variety of issues while offering a broad range of recreation services to the public. We believe it would be very challenging both financially and legally to duplicate these services at a lower cost under a volunteer-run management model.

6. Why join community centers into geographic teams?

- The proposed change in the community center operational model divides our system into five geographic teams of five centers. Each team will be led by a Senior Recreation Program Coordinator and programmed in a coordinated fashion by two Assistant Recreation Center Coordinators. In addition, each community center will have staff assigned to it consistent with the service level provided through it.
- Geographic teams allow more flexibility and efficiency in the use of staff. Geographic team supervisors can reallocate staff and public hours among community centers in a team as circumstances change or special needs arise.
- Geographic team community centers can specialize, thus offering a wider range of services to the public. For instance, one community center might be open early and another late or one might specialize in fitness and another in arts.
- Coordinated programming across a geographic team means that there won't be a duplication of services (e.g., two yoga classes on Wednesday evening and none on Monday or Tuesday, egg hunts at all community centers in a team). We will also be better able to leverage internal resources and define team success rather than individual centers competing with each other. Having a single senior staff person in charge of each geographic team will increase consistency across the team, and having two staff program all the community centers in the team will be more efficient than having one programmer per community center.

7. Why are there five geographic teams?

- Parks considered several different options, including six or seven geographic teams. In the end, we chose five because it provided the maximum amount of programming options across all community centers.
- The advantage of five vs. six or seven geographic teams is that one can implement a management model in which one senior person is responsible for the overall management of all the community centers in the team with support from two staff per team to work on coordinated programming at each center. Under a model with more geographic teams, fewer programming staff were available, which resulted in less programming flexibility across community centers.

8. How were the service levels provided at each community center determined?

- First a team of staff from Parks, the City Budget Office and City Council, assembled the best available data on the physical facilities available at each site, the current use of the community center, and the demographics surrounding it.
 - From this data, specific measures were chosen and a maximum number of points assigned to the measure to reflect the reliability of the data and the overall weight attributed to it. The highest ranking community center for that measure was assigned the maximum points and the lowest ranking community center was assigned zero points. Those in-between the extremes got points proportional to their ranking. Finally, all points for all series were added together and compared to the totals for other community centers in their geographic team.
- The City's Race and Social Justice Initiative provided important insights into the choice of measures used for the service level determinations. For instance, a variety of data reflecting paid use, drop-in use, physical facilities, and scholarships was used so that centers in lower-income neighborhoods would not be disadvantaged. Comparing centers within geographic teams rather than across the whole system also ensured that one area of the City would not receive disproportionately more or less service than another.

9. Why didn't you use census data to measure the community needs?

- Because Seattle is a compact, dense city and many of our community centers are quite close together geographically, a number of census tracts were within the service territories of more than one community center.
- There are also a range of income levels, ethnicities and other measures of community need even within one census district. A high average income, for instance, does not mean that there is not a need for services to those with low incomes.

The group concluded that using the number of individuals using a community center who received scholarships was a better measure of the need among those who actually use the community center.

10. Why do some community centers with lower service levels have higher point totals than some community centers with higher service levels?

- Point totals were compared within geographic teams, not to the entire collective group of community centers. This was one way to reflect the relative needs of different areas while keeping some geographic equity among different areas of the City.

- 11. Why not just make geographic teams and have all community centers treated the same – NO DIFFERENT SERVICE LEVELS?**
- Just grouping the centers does not address differences in how the facilities are utilized by the community. It would continue the “cookie cutter” approach to community center management that was frequently criticized by the public during the first public meetings.
 - In 2011, the City implemented five limited use sites, which essentially created a two service level system. However, the five community centers were chosen without an extensive analysis of usage patterns and community needs and they did not have professional Parks staff assigned to them. Both of these factors resulted in programming and service level issues. These deficiencies have been corrected in this new model.
 - Grouping the community centers without delivering lower service levels at some would actually cost the City money: bringing the limited use sites back to full regular hours would cost more than the geographic management option saves. This means there would be a net cost increase rather than a further cost saving.
- 12. Why do some geographic teams have one Level 1 community center while others have two Level 1 centers? How did you choose which community center would be the extra Level 1 site?**
- In order to preserve as many public hours as possible under the new service model, we chose to include either one or two Level 1 sites in each geographic team.
 - The highest ranking site in each geographic team was budgeted and staffed for Level 1 service and one more site with Level 1 service was added in the north and south areas of the City. These extra Level 1 sites were the next highest ranking centers.
- 13. Why do the number of Level 2a and Level 2b sites vary among geographic teams?**
- Level 1, Level 2a and Level 2b sites were distributed among geographic teams to ensure an equitable distribution of minimum public hours across the five geographic teams. Teams with more than one Level 1 site typically have more Level 2b sites. Teams with only one Level 1 site typically have more Level 2a sites.
 - An extra Level 1 site generally replaced one of the sites that would otherwise have been a Level 2a site? Again, this was done to preserve as many public hours as possible.

- Because Rainier Beach Community Center is closed for construction, the southeast geographic team has only four community centers but two Level 1 sites.

Within a geographic team, community centers with similar point totals are classified in the same level.

14. How much more would it cost to provide Level 2a service rather than Level 2b service?? ... provide Level 1 service rather than Level 2a service?

- \$86,261 to change Level 2b service to Level 2a service
\$56,048 to change Level 2a service to Level 1 service.

15. Why is the staff budget higher for some sites compared with others providing the same service level?

Some sites have extra staff associated with a teen late night program. The teen late night program is not changed by this proposal.

16. What about Southwest Community Center? What's happening to it?

- Southwest Community Center is becoming a specialized teen site. The downstairs portion of the facility will be a Teen Life Center, as it is now. The preschool that currently meets upstairs will move downstairs since this use does not conflict with the teen use.
- The upstairs area will become a Neighborhood Service Center operated by the Department of Neighborhoods (DON). This will provide a place for residents to pay various City bills and to find out about the services offered by the City, including Parks and Recreation.
- The location of DON's outreach staff in a Parks facility will help all of our southwest community centers do a better job of connecting with their communities.

The Southwest Pool will continue to operate as it does currently.

17. Does this proposal hurt the Associated Recreation Councils (ARC)?

- ARC has been a true partner in putting together this proposal. They have been involved in the Community Center Advisory Team that advised the department throughout the option identification process.
- They have offered, for the first time, to help pay for City staff that program both ARC and City run activities. The experience with the limited use sites this year has taught both ARC and Parks that Parks employees are crucial to our mutual success.
- The total added payment to Parks from this community center operational model and a small increase in the PAR fee (the percent of gross revenues that ARC

pays to the City) will mean that ARC is paying almost \$500,000 more per year to Parks.

ARC recognizes the importance of Parks' operational changes to their success and believes that this added payment will help us both thrive in the coming years.

18. What did you learn from the limited use community centers in 2011?

- Parks learned that it is essential to have professional Parks staff assigned to a center. This enhances continuity, consistency, and connections with the community. It also permits better supervision and training of community volunteers.
- Parks also learned that a community center can remain active outside of public hours through the provision of daycare, summer day camps, senior recreation activities, adaptive recreation, and other programs provided by Parks staff that program on a city-wide basis or by partners such as the Associated Recreation Councils (ARC).
- Parks learned the difficulty and yet the value of community centers working together as a team. Each limited use site was paired with a regular community center that supported its management and helped with its programming. The regular site in the pair also learned that there was a limit to the help they could supply to a limited use site.

Parks learned how important professional Parks staff is in supporting ARC through their programming of classes and planning of special events.

19. What is the impact of this option on Parks staff?

- This option results in a decrease in Parks staff of 13.63 full-time equivalents but 75 positions are affected by this change.
- The current staffing model for a regular (i.e. not limited use) center consists of 5 FTE per community center: Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator, Recreation Leader, Recreation Attendant, and Maintenance or Utility Laborer.
- The Geographic Team Model removes the Assistant Coordinator from each center and instead has two Assistant Coordinators per geographic team who work with the Coordinators to program the sites in a coordinated manner. This eliminates 11 Assistant Coordinator positions system-wide.
- The Geographic Team Model also has a Sr. Recreation Program Coordinator position who is responsible for managing each team.
- The staff remaining at each community center depends on the service level provided at the site. Level 1 sites have a Coordinator, a Recreation Leader, 1.5 Recreation Attendants, and a Maintenance or Utility Laborer (4.5 FTE total). Level 2a sites have a Coordinator, 0.75 Recreation Leader, 0.75 Recreation Attendant, and a Maintenance or Utility Laborer (3.5 FTE total). Level 2b sites

have 0.5 Coordinator, 0.5 Recreation Leader, 0.5 Recreation Attendant, and 0.5 Maintenance or Utility Laborer (2.0 FTE total).

- The Senior Coordinator positions provide more opportunities for advancement for employees.
- Jobs are preserved by reducing rather than eliminating some positions. This allows some employees to retain benefits, even though their hours are reduced. There may also be opportunities for employees to work above their budgeted hours in place of temporary employees that otherwise would have been hired. This change also preserves employment relative to closing enough community centers to save the same amount of money.

20. Why did the City Council request that this analysis be done for community centers rather than other Parks and Recreation facilities such as swimming pools or athletic fields?

- The City Council spent considerable time reviewing the Parks Department proposal for Limited Use Community Centers during the Fall of 2010.
- Following that review, Council asked Parks to conduct further analysis on community centers, with the underlying idea that community centers, like many City functions, might be able to provide services in a different manner, be more responsive to community needs, and utilize less general fund monies.
- City Council also asked Parks to work with the Rowing and Sailing Centers to chart a path toward substantial self-sufficiency that could be implemented in the 2013-2014 budget.
- Based on the efforts of the past eight months, Council may ask for similar analysis of other areas of the Parks and Recreation budget.